

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON OPERATION OF HOPPER DREDGES
IN THE FREEPORT HARBOR CHANNEL PROJECT

On January 5, 1997, contract hopper dredges began emergency work on the Entrance and Jetty Channels of the Freeport Harbor Channel Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 2,773,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 49 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging along the Entrance Channel and 47 feet MLT with 2 feet of overdepth along the Jetty Channel.

Dredging began on January 5, 1997, and was completed on April 21, 1997. Three dredges were employed under this contract, they were the *Sugar Island*, *Eagle I* and the *Padre Island*. The *Sugar Island* worked from January 5, 1997 until January 26, 1997, dredging 224 loads. The *Eagle I* worked from January 25, 1997 until February 22, 1997, and dredged 497 loads of dredged material. The *Padre Island* worked from April 1, 1997 until April 21, 1997, and dredged 229 loads of dredged material. A total of 950 loads of dredged material were collected and placed into Placement Area No. 1-A. Dredging was performed between Stations 71+52.58 along the Jetty Channel and -200+00 along the Entrance Channel. A total of 2,488,808 CY of material was excavated from this project.

The dredge was equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with a 4-inch square mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by Coastwise Consulting, Inc.

No turtles were encountered during the performance of this dredging. A copy of the daily and weekly observer reports is enclosed.

One of the recurring difficulties experienced by the observers involved the excessive amounts of clay that were often dredged. The clay was taken as cohesive masses which often clogged the screening and made cleanup physically difficult and time-consuming. The dredge also often picked up abundant amounts of trash, which fouled the screens and required manual removal.